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Mentoring programs help youth, economy

The relationship between education and income has long been shown. The Savannah Metropolitan Statistical Area — Chatham, Bryan and Effingham counties — has a high school noncompletion rate of roughly 14 percent.

The cumulative effect translates to about 20



Jamie Lane

percent of the population with less than a high school



Donna Fisher

education level. And while the local economy tends to be a bit ahead of the rest of the state, a staggering 21.9 percent of our population lives below the poverty level. More than 43 percent of the families in our area have a median income under \$50,000.

We've all heard of the downward spiral of poverty

— how those from economically disadvantaged households struggle to move beyond the income and education levels to which they were born. One proven intervention in this dismal trend is mentoring.

For our purposes, mentoring is a structured, one-to-one relationship or partnership that focuses on the needs of mentored participants. It fosters caring and supportive relationships and encourages individuals to develop to their fullest potential. Mentoring helps an individual develop his or her own vision for the future.

The region has at least 13 well established mentoring programs. These serve youth from as young as 5 through 22 years of age. Mentoring activities operate through schools, the workplace, churches and community centers. Some are gender and/or race specific.

The specific arrangement between the mentor and the student can be one-on-one or in a team or group setting. The time frame of the mentoring relationship ranges from a single or sporadic encounter to formal meeting schedules.

We can make a difference and at the same time create a more productive work force. Organizations such as Junior Achievement

BIG BROTHERS BIG SISTERS STUDENT GRADES

Subject	2008-9	2009-10	Percent Change
Social Studies	75.8	83.4	9.8
Math	74.8	81.5	8.9
Reading	74.7	80.7	7.9
English	75.4	83.3	10.0
Science	78.9	83.1	5.3
Conduct (1-4 scale)	2.79	3.0	7.5

and Gulfstream's Leadership Council help participants develop the essential skills that make possible potential career opportunities that might not otherwise be available.

Mentoring is most effective when a strong relationship develops between mentors and the students. Studies show the longer the relationship, the better. In fact, short-term relationships can prove more detrimental than no relationship at all.

Jean Rhodes at the University of Massachusetts-Boston finds that high-quality enduring relationships improve academic, behavioral and psycho-social outcomes.

Our local Big Brothers Big Sisters produces similar results. In 2010, Savannah's BBBS received national recognition for meeting or exceeding its 2009 program goals. Last year, the agency helped 279 at-risk youth.

Student grades improved between 5 and 10 percent. In addition, teacher's comments were 77 percent more positive.

The bottom line is high-quality mentoring, which includes long-term interaction that creates a caring, supportive relationship, works. Mentoring improves the possibilities for at-risk youth and can benefit the local economy as it transforms our work force into a more productive set of individuals.

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Courtesy of Gail Eubanks/Savannah Technical College

Grainger gives Savannah Technical College \$10,000 for scholarships

BUSINESS IN SAVANNAH

Joe Haddad, second from right, branch manager for Grainger Inc., recently presented a \$10,000 check to Savannah Technical College President Kathy Love. The Grainger Foundation funding will be used to support scholarships for industrial technology students.

Two current Grainger Scholarship recipients joined in the check presenta-

tion: Arthur Green, left, a student in the college's Air Conditioning Technology program, and Kathryn Hardigan, a student in the Electrical Construction and Maintenance Technology program.

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